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2020

## Best Practices in Graduate Education At Western

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# Best Practices in Graduate Education At Western



## Graduate Supervision

### A Guide for Supervisor-Student Conversations Regarding Expectations

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Graduate Teaching Fellow

2020

Centre for Teaching and Learning  
Western University

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Sincere appreciation is extended to the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) who initiated the discussion about the need for a best practices document in facilitating conversations between supervisors and graduate students.



# SUPERVISION AT WESTERN

At Western, we believe that best practices in graduate education require the development of healthy and productive working relationships between supervisors and graduate students. This document provides important information for both graduate supervisors and students and is intended to support the development of that productive working relationship. Graduate students and supervisors are encouraged to read the contents carefully and to use the suggestions provided below as you begin and progress throughout your graduate journey together.

## IMPORTANCE OF OPEN COMMUNICATION

All professional and academic relationships must be grounded in mutual respect and trust that encompasses principles of academic integrity, and open inquiry/expression, free of any form of discrimination, intimidation or harassment. Both supervisor and student must assume responsibility for working collaboratively with open channels of communication from the beginning of their educational relationship to the successful completion of the student's program. This includes contributing to a supportive environment for all personnel.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES OF THE SUPERVISOR AND GRADUATE STUDENT

The roles of the supervisor are varied and complex: the role is one of mentor and coach in learning and research but also requires supervisory responsibility for academic oversight and support for timely and successful completion of studies.

## CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

Because tensions can arise in situations where the roles and expectations of each party in the supervisory relationship are unclear, a thorough understanding of each person's role is critical to productive learning and successful outcomes. In fact, starting the supervisor-student relationship with open understandings of each person's role leads to positive outcomes that result in greater satisfaction for both student and supervisor as well as timely completion of each element of the program.

To understand the expectations of students and supervisors as outlined by Western, please review the following:

- School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: [grad.uwo.ca](https://grad.uwo.ca)
- Graduate Supervisor's Handbook: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html)
- Expectations of Supervisors: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html)
- Graduate Student Regulations: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html)

# SUPPORT SERVICES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

As part of a successful graduate student experience, Western provides support services in multiple areas for students during their studies and we recommend that graduate students take advantage of these resources as needed.

Graduate students should familiarize themselves with the various support services as listed below before their first meeting with their supervisor.

- Accessibility: [accessibility.uwo.ca](https://accessibility.uwo.ca)
- Campus Recreation: [uwo.ca/campusrec](https://uwo.ca/campusrec)
- Centre for Teaching and Learning: [teaching.uwo.ca](https://teaching.uwo.ca)
- Funding: [grad.uwo.ca/finances](https://grad.uwo.ca/finances)
- Regulations for Graduate Study: [grad.uwo.ca/academics](https://grad.uwo.ca/academics)
- Health Services: [uwo.ca/health](https://uwo.ca/health)
- Equity & Human Rights Services: [uwo.ca/equity/about](https://uwo.ca/equity/about)
- Information & Privacy: [uwo.ca/univsec/privacy](https://uwo.ca/univsec/privacy)
- Mental Wellness: [uwo.ca/health/psych](https://uwo.ca/health/psych)
- Research and Ethics: [uwo.ca/research/ethics](https://uwo.ca/research/ethics)
- Safe Campus: [safecampus.uwo.ca](https://safecampus.uwo.ca)
- Accessible Education: [academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education](https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education)
- Student Experience: [studentexperience.uwo.ca/leadershiplearning](https://studentexperience.uwo.ca/leadershiplearning)
- School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: [grad.uwo.ca](https://grad.uwo.ca)
- Graduate Supervisor's Handbook: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html)
- Expectations of Supervisors: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html)
- Graduate Student Regulations: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html)
- Teaching Assistantship Programs: [teaching.uwo.ca/programs/certificates/cutl.html](https://teaching.uwo.ca/programs/certificates/cutl.html)

# Using this Manual

## PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

As a result of inquiries raised by graduate students and supervisors about strategies to facilitate open communication and understanding of expectations, a project was set up to develop best practices in graduate supervision. Beginning with the collection and review of related documents from other universities, as well reviewing our own processes, the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), graduate students from the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) executive, and Graduate Associate Deans at Western held numerous collaborative discussions to develop a protocol to support open communication in supervisory relationships.

We then asked our graduate students to identify what specific aspects of graduate studies students should know about when beginning their program. They pointed to firstly, setting a meeting to develop an open understanding between each graduate student and their supervisor about the aspects that impact their collaborative work; secondly, attending to the development of a productive professional relationship where students feel free to ask questions about their supervisor's expectations; and thirdly, providing a mechanism for documenting expectations.

## PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

The intention of this document is to promote a collegial environment in which expectations, responsibilities, and concerns of both graduate students and supervisors can be openly discussed and clarified. We have formulated a series of questions that are intended to provide an organizational and individualized tool that will require clear discussions about roles and responsibilities between graduate students and their supervisors. Because expectations and responsibilities may change over time during the program, students and supervisors should revisit this document and understandings at various stages throughout the student's program.

## WHEN TO USE THIS MANUAL

It is recommended that graduate program personnel, supervisors and students use this manual at various stages throughout the period of study as appropriate to the student, supervisor, and program. However, we strongly suggest that this document be used for discussion:

- i. By applicants with graduate personnel and/or potential supervisors when considering enrolment at Western;



- ii. By students with graduate advisors or assigned supervisors at the beginning of their program<sup>1</sup>; and,
- iii. By students and supervisors as deemed necessary throughout the program when clarification of expectations change or need revisiting.

## ABOUT THIS MANUAL

The following headings and questions provide examples that students and supervisors raised as important points of discussion for understanding expectations. We suggest that each supervisor and graduate student review this list of questions together and have an open dialogue about the various aspects of graduate study as they begin their journey together as partners in shared learning.

*Please note that the categories and questions included below are intended to be used as discussion-starters and are by no means exhaustive. Students and supervisors should feel free to add or delete questions, using this as a guide to develop content appropriate to each program and situation.*

We recommend that each graduate student and supervisor:

- i. review the expectations for graduate supervisors and students as well as graduate regulations, then set a meeting to discuss the various aspects. Links to this information can be accessed at:
  - School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: [grad.uwo.ca](http://grad.uwo.ca)
  - Graduate Supervisor's Handbook:  
[grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html](http://grad.uwo.ca/administration/supervision.html)
  - Expectations of Supervisors:  
[grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html](http://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/11.html)
  - Graduate Student Regulations:  
[grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html](http://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html)
- ii. print a personal copy of this booklet and bring it to your first meeting;
- iii. ask questions appropriate to your area of study as suggested below in the manual feeling free to add or delete as appropriate to the program of study;
- iv. write down your decisions to confirm expectations; ask for clarification of aspects to ensure understanding;
- v. revisit these expectations throughout the program, noting changes, additions and deletions.

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1 In some programs, graduate students are not assigned a supervisor until later in the program, in which case we highly recommend that graduate students feel free to contact their graduate chair or associate dean (graduate) to clarify expectations.

# Information that Graduate Students Need to Know

## 1. PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

I have read the information on the website about my program specifics, such as course expectations and milestones and I have also read the regulations for Graduate Students at Western: [grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations](https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations).

**Questions that arise may include:**

*May I take a course in “xxx” outside the department to support my research?*

*May I take additional courses over and above the required courses?*

*May I take an undergraduate course for credit?*

*Are courses offered in all three terms i.e., (Fall, Winter, Summer)?*

*Does the program have research seminars/workshops? Am I required to attend?  
To participate?*





*Can I borrow resources (e.g., books, materials, supplies) from the department for my work?*

*What is the normal timeline for completion of each part of the program?*

*What happens if I do not complete my work on time? (e.g., coursework, comps, thesis) May I access funding past the normal duration of the program?*

**I understand that I should participate in Professional Development programs such as Own Your Future as offered by SGPS.**

**Questions that arise may include:**

*Are there workshops or programs offered in the department/faculty that I can attend as I plan for my future career?*

## NOTES

## 2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Questions that arise may include:

*Am I part of a research team/group?*

*How many graduate students and faculty are in our research group/team?*

*With respect to research outcomes, what is the expectation of the members of the group (e.g., Master's students? Doctoral students? Postdoctoral fellows? Other faculty?)*

*Is there a protocol for sharing department resources?*

## NOTES

### 3. FUNDING

**In addition to reading the information at [grad.uwo.ca/finances](http://grad.uwo.ca/finances)**

*What funding will I receive each term?*

*When will I be informed of the funding for the next term/year?*

*How long will my funding last?*

*What are the expectations for me during the funding period (e.g., TA; GRA; RA)?*

*What does a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) do?*

*Will I be assigned a role as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) or Graduate Student Assistant (GSA) during my studies?*

### NOTES

## 4. SCHOLARSHIP FUNDING

### Questions that arise may include:

*Am I required to apply for scholarships to support my funding?*

*What scholarships are available to support my study in this field?*

*Can you help me find information about applying for scholarships?*

*If I win a scholarship, how will my funding package change?*

*Thank you for being willing to read over drafts of scholarship applications. How long before the deadline would you need the draft to read and respond?*

## NOTES

## 5. WORK SPACE

### Questions that arise may include:

*Outside of class, will there be (office/lab) space for me to work on my research?*

*To whom do I speak about office or study space?*

*Will the space remain in the same location throughout my studies?*

*Is the space likely to be shared? With whom?*

*What resources are available for me to use? (e.g., library, storage, lab materials, etc.)*

*What computer facilities are available for my study use?*

*What computer programs are provided for study use?*

*May I continue to use computer programs and applications after graduation?*

## NOTES

## 6. PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION & MEETINGS

### Questions that arise may include:

*What is the best way to contact you? (e.g., email, text, phone, office hours)*

*How often should we meet to discuss my progress/research?*

*Should I be the one setting the meetings?*

*Is there a research team with whom we will be meeting regularly?*

*Who sets those meetings? Where and when are they held?*

*Will I have a supervisory committee?*

*How often do we meet? Who sets those meetings?*

*If I am submitting a draft of a paper or a chapter, how long does it usually take for me to receive your feedback?*

## NOTES

## 7. PUBLICATIONS, AUTHORSHIP AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (MAPP)

I have read the university's MAPP policy: [uwo.ca/research/ethics/policies.html](http://uwo.ca/research/ethics/policies.html)

Questions that arise may include:

*Am I expected to publish during my studies?*

*What counts as a contribution for publications and what kinds of publications are suitable?  
(e.g., professional or academic journals; book chapters; conference symposia)*

*Am I expected to publish my thesis after completing the program? If yes, and I don't publish, what happens to my thesis findings? Where is my work most likely to be published?*

*Will I be involved in multiple author publications?*

*If so, how is author order decided?*

## NOTES

## 8. CONFERENCES AND TRAVEL

### Questions that arise may include:

*Is presenting my research at conferences important in my work?*

*If so, could you inform me of conference opportunities?*

*Is there any funding for conference registration and accommodations? Do I need to apply for the funding?*

*Are there opportunities for me to have a leadership role in organizing conferences in our area?*

## NOTES



## 9. CONFIDENTIALITY & ETHICS

I have read Western's information about academic integrity and honesty found online at [uwo.ca/ombuds/guides/cheating2018.pdf](https://uwo.ca/ombuds/guides/cheating2018.pdf). I have also read and understand Western's policies and procedures for ethical research procedures, as found at [uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies\\_procedures/section7/mapp70.pdf](https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section7/mapp70.pdf). I acknowledge my ethical responsibility as a student, as researcher (and GTA/ GRA/etc.) and will carry out my duties with integrity.

**Questions that arise may include:**

*Could you clarify the level of confidentiality of our research project?*

*How will data be kept for the (research group/my) project?*

*Am I required to sign a confidentiality agreement?*

*Will I need to complete ethical review for my research?*

*Will my research be governed by an ethics protocol as part of a larger research group?*

## NOTES

## 10. WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND VACATION

I have read and understand the regulations expected of a full-time student as found at [grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html](http://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/4.html). I acknowledge that I am entitled to at least two weeks of vacation (10 business days) per year excluding statutory holidays, when the university is closed or when I am ill.

**Questions that arise may include:**

*So that I can manage my time and not bother you on vacation, when do you normally take your vacation?*

*Are there optimal times for me to take vacation from studies or times when I should not be away? How far in advance should I discuss my vacation period with you?*

*Is it acceptable for me to work on my studies from home?*

*n.b. This discussion will be impacted by personal life situations, for example, for parents of children.*

## NOTES

## 11. HEALTH AND SAFETY

### Questions that arise may include:

*What safety certifications are required of me? When and how do I complete those?*

*What safety concerns are there in this area?*

## NOTES

## 12. OTHER QUESTIONS

### NOTES

